



Family Centre Information Package

Communication



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WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication is a term applied to the procedure of using words as well as sounds, signs, or gestures to transmit information or to express your ideas, feelings, etc., to another person. So it is clear that communication involves more than just what you say. *How* you say it can be just as important as the words you use.

WHY IS COMMUNICATION SO IMPORTANT?

Good communication skills can be applied to all areas of life: personal friendships, intimate relationships, work situations, conflict resolution, parenting, and even encounters with acquaintances and strangers. Communication allows others to know what we are thinking and feeling, and allows us the opportunity to explain, question, and clarify things that are not understood. Given that most of us are not mind-readers, communication is an essential part of social interactions.

TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

There are 4 main styles of communication: Passive, Aggressive, Passive-Aggressive, and Assertive. We will look at these styles and their effects individually.

PASSIVE COMMUNICATION

"I don't really matter all that much."

- A passive communicator respects the needs of others before his own. He doesn't like to "rock the boat."
- She may often speak quietly or hesitate a lot when speaking.
- He is not likely to stand up for himself, and may allow himself to be bullied, or even ignored.
- She may avoid expressing her opinions but, when she does, she may follow them with phrases like, "but it isn't really important," or "unless you don't want to."

- Someone who is passive will often have slumped posture and avoid making much direct eye contact.
- He may nod in agreement with another speaker, no matter what is being said.
- She may apologize a lot, even when something is not her fault.

Passive communication can have the following effects on the communicator:

- Initially, the communicator may feel good for being “selfless,” though this may not last long
- Can have a negative effect on self-esteem, as well as on relationships
- Feelings of being hurt, even angry, due to needs being ignored by others
- Serious issues are rarely addressed
- Can feel depressed or anxious



Source: Clip Art

AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION

“No one else matters as much as I do.”

- An aggressive person ensures her needs are met in a way that violates the needs of others. She may even believe others do not have the right to ask for what they want.
- He may try to avoid discomfort at all costs, even if it means getting into conflict.
- She may try to dominate others, sometimes by humiliation, criticism, or blame.
- An aggressive communicator will often speak in a loud, overbearing voice and behave in a rude or threatening manner.
- He likely is not a good listener and may frequently interrupt others.
- She is not likely to compromise with others.
- Aggressive communication is often born out of low self-esteem.

Aggressive communication may have the following effects (among others):

- Potential to escalate to yelling and/or physical aggression
- Alienation of self and others
- Creating fear, anger, resentment in relationships
- Damage may be done to others’ self-esteem
- Initially, this style can make the communicator feel better, but feelings of guilt and shame may follow an outburst

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION

“You should know what matters, but I’m not telling you if you don’t.”

- A passive-aggressive person communicates her needs in an indirect way rather than stating them plainly.

- While appearing passive on the surface, anger is acted out in subtle ways.
- He may use sarcasm or make jokes frequently, though close consideration shows the jokes to be more hurtful than funny.
- She may mutter under her breath or send a dirty look when in conflict, but deny anything is wrong.
- He may seem to be cooperative, yet do things to annoy or undermine.
- She may have difficulty acknowledging her anger and other negative emotions.
- His facial expressions may be inconsistent with his emotions, such as smiling when disappointed or angry.
- She may complain often about being a “doormat” while being unwilling to do anything to change it.
- A passive-aggressive style often develops from feeling powerless and resentful.

The effects of passive-aggression may include:

- Alienation from others
- Sarcasm, biting comments, and “jokes” can result in hurt feelings in others
- Personal relationships may become strained
- Serious issues and concerns are rarely dealt with
- Can lead to frustration for both the communicator (feeling like they have no voice) and for the listener (never knowing what the communicator really wants)
- Suspicion from others about communicator’s real meaning

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

“You matter just as much as I do.”

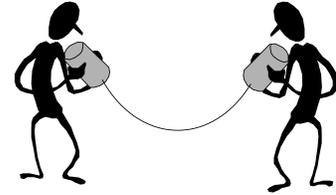
- An assertive communicator expresses his own needs and opinions while ensuring the needs and opinions of others are also respected.
- Feelings and opinions are stated clearly and appropriately.
- An assertive person values herself and advocates for herself.
- He is a good listener and doesn’t interrupt.
- She will have good eye contact and confident, relaxed posture.
- He speaks in a calm, clear voice.
- She strives to compromise so everyone’s needs are met as best they can.
- He is comfortable asking for what he needs or wants.
- She is able to deal with conflict in direct and healthy ways.
- He takes responsibility for himself and doesn’t take responsibility for others’ actions.
- She knows, and communicates, her personal boundaries.
- He doesn’t try to control others.



Source: Clip Art

The effects of assertive communication can include:

- Problems are often solved in an agreeable manner
- Increased self-esteem
- Improved interpersonal relationships
- Increased feeling of being connected to others
- Feeling in control of your life



Source: Clip Art

DO COMMUNICATION STYLES CHANGE?

Most of us have used each of these communication styles at least once in a while. Imagine you are out at a restaurant having dinner and, when the food is brought to the table, you find you didn't get what you ordered. The server comes to the table and asks how the meal tastes so far.

- Perhaps, if you had a very bad day or had a fight with your partner, you may respond in an **aggressive** way: "This isn't what I ordered at all! Take it back immediately and bring me what I ordered, if it won't be too much trouble for you to do your job properly!"
- Maybe you're frustrated because people seemed to be taking credit for your ideas all day. You might respond in a **passive-aggressive** way, smiling sweetly: "Everything is just fine, thanks. Just the way I like it." When your server leaves, you add to your friends "I guess I'll have to learn to like this, since it's what I got. So much for her tip..."
- If you are really tired, or just not feeling yourself that day, you may decide it just isn't worth the bother of telling your server she messed up the order. Your answer may be a **passive** "It's great, thanks," and keep eating.
- On a good day, you may have the confidence to answer **assertively**: "It looks really delicious, but I'm afraid this isn't what I had ordered. Would you please take it back and bring my order?"

HOW DO I KNOW IF COMMUNICATION IS A PROBLEM?

In order to communicate effectively, a speaker must do more than just say words. Communication includes body language and other non-verbal behaviours (like how fast you are speaking, or the pitch of your voice). It also helps to be a good listener. After all, can you really be communicating well if you are not addressing what your partner is saying?

Everyone has difficulty communicating at times. This is a normal part of the human condition; sometimes we make mistakes! However, if communication is a chronic problem for you, you may notice some of the following (note that many of the different issues are related to different communication styles, so you are not likely to experience all of these concerns):

- You feel confused or uncomfortable in most conversations.

- You are known as someone who always blows up in discussions.
- When you try to solve one problem, you end up with more to solve.
- People avoid talking to you, especially when it comes to serious or uncomfortable discussions.
- People don't seem to have heard, or understood, what you have said. Or you have difficulty in getting questions answered.
- You frequently come away from a conversation feeling confused, dissatisfied, unfulfilled, angry, resentful, guilty, smug, or a variety of other uncomfortable emotions.
- You wind up yelling almost every time you talk to your spouse/partner or children.
- You frequently feel unwilling to say what you are feeling or express your needs directly.
- You often lose track of a conversation because you are distracted by your internal commentary **about** the conversation
- You often interrupt others when they are speaking to you.
- You have few intimate relationships, or your relationships are not deeply intimate.
- You often feel blindsided when people become emotional in their conversations with you.

There are many other ways in which a communication problem might show itself. But the bottom line is: if you have trouble in expressing your views, feelings, or needs and having them understood by others, you may want to brush up on assertive communication skills. You may want to do so anyway - anyone can benefit from communicating more assertively!

FAMILY CENTRE SERVICES

Family Centre offers a variety of programs that focus on improving communication:

- [Kids and Conversation](#): teaches parents and caregivers how to communicate effectively with children (toddlers and preschoolers).
- [Baby Signing](#): teaches parents how to communicate with their babies (4-18 months old) before the child is able to communicate with words.
- [Parenting After Separation](#): this program is designed for separated and divorced parents of children aged 0-16 and teaches effective co-parenting and communication skills.
- [Focus on Communication in Separation](#): this program is designed for separated and divorced parents of children aged 0-6 and teaches co-parents how to effectively communicate for the sake of the children.

Family Centre also offers individual and family counselling services (ages 7+). If you are interested in scheduling a counselling session, please call Family Centre (403) 320-4232 extension 240, to speak to an intake counsellor.

Family Centre offers the Kin Family Resource Library. Visitors to the library have access to books, videos, DVDs, and magazines that cover a variety of topics. The Kin Family Resource Library is a free service; all that is required is a library card, which is available at the reception desk. To search and reserve available resources click [here](#).

HOW TO COMMUNICATE ASSERTIVELY



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There are several things you can do to increase your use of assertive communication. Some of these include the following:

- Start with baby steps: practice your assertiveness skills in low-risk or low-emotion situations and work your way up to the big ones.
 - State your point of view clearly and be concise. It will be easier for you to be understood if you are “to the point.”
- Tell the other person how you feel and make sure to listen when they do the same.
 - It may help to build a good “feelings vocabulary.” You can find lists of emotions [here](#), or [here](#)
 - Speak at a normal volume, and a normal pace. Remember that *how* you say something can be just as important as what you say.
 - Maintain good posture and neutral body language, and make good eye contact. Try to look confident, even if you don’t feel that way.
 - Try to keep control of your emotions when communicating. When emotions run high, we are more likely to lash out aggressively or passively shut down. This makes it more difficult to be assertive.
 - Make an effort to talk about yourself in positive ways. Try to avoid adding *qualifiers* like “You might think this is crazy...” or “...but that’s just my opinion.” And try not to follow up your statements with questions, like “Is that okay?”
 - When possible, rehearse what you would like to say ahead of time, so you will be prepared when the time comes to talk. That way you won’t be scrambling to think of how to best voice your opinion.
 - It is very difficult for some people to refuse a request, and practicing can make it easier. Be firm, and only offer an explanation if it is necessary. A simple “No, I won’t be able to” can be very effective.
 - Stick to facts. Avoid judgements and exaggerations.

ACTIVE LISTENING



Source: Clip Art

Listening is just as important as speaking in communication. Many people think listening is a passive activity that means “being quiet while the other person is speaking.” But, to be an effective listener, you need to take an active role! When you do, you will most likely find you have fewer misunderstandings and more open conversations. *Active listening* includes several techniques you can use to show the other person you are listening to, and understanding, what she is saying, or to clarify and

get more information from the speaker. You may want to reflect back the content of what is being said (i.e., the actual message) or the emotions you believe the speaker is feeling. You don’t want to reflect back every sentence being said – that can sound like parroting and be very distracting. Stick to the important points and/or paraphrase every few minutes. You can start your paraphrasing with something like (*add the feeling parts in when you are trying to paraphrase feelings*):

- What I’m hearing is ... (*you feel.....*)
- It sounds like ... (*you are feeling.....*)
- I think you’re saying ... (*that you feel...*)

Active listening also includes obtaining more information when you don’t understand something using clarifying questions. Just make sure you wait until the speaker is finished his point before asking them. Clarifying questions can sound like:

- By _____ do you mean _____?
- Can you explain that a bit more for me?
- How do you feel about that? (*some people don’t automatically talk about their feelings*)

It is best not to interrupt when someone else is speaking, especially if you want to make a counter-argument. It will most likely frustrate everyone and makes it harder to understand the message. Wait until there is a natural pause in the conversation or until the person speaking has finished her point.

Make appropriate responses, meaning avoid attacking or otherwise pressuring the speaker. The point of active listening is to understand the other person’s perspective. Be honest, but assertive, about your responses to the information, even if you feel yourself having an emotional response to what is being said. If that happens, you might want to say something like:

- I’m not sure I understand what you’re saying correctly and I find myself feeling defensive. What I thought you said was _____. Is that what you meant?

For quick-reference information on active listening and tips on how to active listening, click [here](#).

I STATEMENTS

I statements are very useful tools for communicating assertively because they allow you to express your feelings and opinions in a way that does not blame, judge, or accuse the other person. You statements do just the opposite. Examples of you statements might be “You are so lazy!” or “You make me so mad!”

I Statements take 3 steps:

- Name the feeling (“I feel...”)
 - Try to avoid inserting “like” or “that” after “I feel.” This is actually a disguised you statement
- Identify the behaviour or conditions under which you feel this way (“when...”)
 - NOTE: try not to include the word “you” in this part because it can make the other person feel blamed and result in defensiveness. An effective *I statement* is all about the speaker, not the listener!
- Explain why those conditions/behaviours lead to the feeling (“because...”)
- (Optional 4th step) Include a behaviour/condition you would rather see

Instead of saying “I feel angry when you ignore me and walk away,” an example of an effective *I statement* might be:

- I feel angry and resentful when we do not get to finish a discussion because I interpret that to mean the issue isn’t important. I would prefer that we finish the discussion so we can resolve the issue.

When in doubt, you can always stick with the simplest of *I statements*: those that include only how you feel. Once you identify how you are feeling, you can pursue a conversation about why you feel that way.

- I feel unheard right now.
- I am worried about our relationship.
- I feel hurt by that statement.

Just to be clear, the following sentence stem examples are NOT *I statements*. Although they begin with talking about how you feel, they are designed to accuse and blame the person with whom you are speaking. They are aggressive, rather than assertive, statements:

- I feel that you....
- I feel like you...

REMEMBER: The formula for *I statements* looks like this:

I feel _____ when _____ because _____. (Optional extra) I would prefer _____.

RESOURCES

LOCAL RESOURCES

- Lethbridge Family Services Counselling 403-327-5724
 - 1107 2A Avenue N., Lethbridge, AB T1H 0E6
 - LFS provides counselling services to individuals, both adults and children, who are experiencing difficulties in their lives, including anxiety. Subsidies may be available.

- Associates Counselling Services 403-381-6000
 - 239 12B Street N., Lethbridge, AB, T1H 2K8
 - Associates is an association of independent professionals and offers a wide range of counselling services, including family and child/youth counselling. Subsidies may be available.

- Crossroads Counselling Centre 403-327-7080
 - 202 – 542 7 St. S, Lethbridge, AB, T1J 2H1
 - Crossroads offers counselling to individuals, couples, and families for a variety of concerns. Subsidies may be available.

WEBSITES

- Effective Communication:
http://www.helpguide.org/mental/effective_communication_skills.htm
- Mind Tools Online Training System – Improve Your Communication Skills:
<http://www.mindtools.com/page8.html>

VIDEO

- *Dunstan Baby Language*: This DVD program will teach parents how to identify the noises babies (aged 0-3 months) make and what these noises mean. Available in the Kin Family Resource Library.

BOOKS

- *Saying What You Mean* by Joy Wilt: This book teaches children about communication skills and how we communicate using our face, body, words, and art. Available in the Kin Family Resource Library.
- *Crucial Conversations* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler: This book teaches strategies and skills for turning hurt feelings into productive dialogue, especially in high-stakes situations, making it “safe to talk about almost anything.”

- *How to Talk so Your Kids Will Listen and Listen so Your Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish: This book is for parents and others who work with kids, providing suggestions for coping with a child's negative feelings, expressing your own feelings without being hurtful, and using praise effectively
- *The Dance of Connection: How to Talk to Someone When You're Mad, Hurt, Scared, Frustrated, Insulted, Betrayed, or Desperate* by Harriet Lerner: Whether dealing with a spouse or partner, friend or family member, this book offers strategies for conversing with honesty and integrity, even if the other person isn't.

To find some of these books, along with many other great resources, please visit the Kin Family Resource Library at Family Centre. Additional books can also be found using the following sites:

- <http://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/communication>
- <http://www.amazon.com/A-list-of-Communication-Books/lm/R11MNH1SAGYSU2>

OTHER

- Toastmasters: Club members will improve communication, leadership, and public-speaking skills in a supportive setting. For local clubs click [here](#).
- Communication in Relationships (pdf):
http://www.loveisrespect.org/pdf/How_Can_I_Communicate_Better.pdf

REFERENCES

- David Burns
- <http://serenityonlinetherapy.com/assertiveness.htm>
- <http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/docs/Info-assertive%20communication.pdf>
- <http://www.squidoo.com/passive-aggressive-assertive>
- <http://www.lotusgroup.biz/blog/passive-assertive-aggressive-how-to-tell-the-difference/>
- <http://www.mindtools.com/page8.html>